

Editor's Note

In “My Freedom,” Lanie Anton sets up the essay with an initial conflict: Anton vs. her English teacher, “Mrs. Street,” whom she refers to as “unpleasant,” “horrible,” and “grumpy.” Anton wants “that perfect A”; Mrs. Street wants Anton to find her “voice.” In developing this conflict, Anton uses concrete detail (can you find examples?) that show her voice, a concept that continues to elude her even by the end of the essay. As you read, consider the following: What is “voice”? How does Anton define it? How do you? How would you describe this essay’s voice?

The “conflict” is not necessarily settled in the end: the author doesn’t triumph; in fact, she still struggles, she says, to express her voice. How does this affect Anton’s *ethos*? What do you make of an inconclusive conclusion? Must essays always resolve?

What are the rules of writing Anton discusses in her essay—the rules she has adhered to with success (until the dreaded Mrs. Street)? What are some of the rules of writing you’ve learned? Should writers break these rules? Do you?

My Freedom

Lanie Anton

I have been trying to find my voice ever since my tenth grade English teacher, Mrs. Street, told me I didn’t have one. This was her response when I turned in an essay analyzing the novel *Pigs in Heaven*. It was a compare and contrast essay about the relationship between the main character Taylor Greer and her daughter, Turtle. It mirrored every other essay I had turned in my previous years, the classic five-paragraph paper that I have managed to perfect through much practice.

Mrs. Street was a horrible woman. Although, she turned out to be a great English teacher, she was just most unpleasant. I knew what my voice was; it consisted of a hook, thesis, three body paragraphs, and finally a conclusion. That was the way I had been writing essays for years, how was this one person telling me that I had been doing it without a voice?

What is your voice? Is it your opinion? Sure. Is it the vocabulary and word choices you use to shine through your writing? You bet. Is it the way you approach your writing as a whole? Most definitely.

So the next essay assigned, I tried to “find my voice.” To be honest I thought that this was just one of Mrs. Street’s ways of being a grumpy old teacher, a way to make her students fear her red pen and never be able to get that perfect A. So I tried to shine through my writing. I had to approach the essay in a different manner so I intro-

duced myself to the thesaurus, and tackled new grammar techniques that I hadn't used since the seventh grade. I was positive that using new words and changing the format of my paragraphs would charm over Mrs. Street. This was bound to get her off my back. When I got my essay back I expected to get a note on the back saying something along the lines of "nice job." But instead, in the dreaded red pen was Mrs. Street explaining that I still was not in touch with my voice. The nerve of that woman!

Even though I was thought it was my way or the highway, I couldn't risk another bad grade. Previously, with A after A on my papers with the occasional B I found my comfort zone. I knew how to spit out a perfect three body paragraphs. I could write the classic hook. And here is this teacher, telling me that all that is not my voice. I tried to do it my own way, but now, after strike two, I needed help. I couldn't risk another grade that would threaten my overall GPA. After school I walked into her class, my head hung low in defeat.

Mrs. Street told me (in her mean, crabby English-teacher way) that I needed to be comfortable with what I write. When I hear the words "writing assignment," I shrink in my seat. I despise them. She also told me to be at ease when approaching a writing assignment. She said that if I didn't stand behind what I wrote then it could not be truly my voice. It needed to be what I believed, not a regurgitation of someone else's thoughts. She also gave me permission to be more creative with the presentation of my thoughts. She gave me freedom in what I wrote. I could make paragraphs where I wanted, there was no minimum or maximum of sentences in each one.

I could even make a one-sentence paragraph.

Before this no one had asked me my opinion. It was either a research paper, book report, or "what I did that summer." All they wanted were facts, facts, facts. Never "what is your interpretation?" I was scolded if I ever wanted to put myself into the paper. No "I" statements were allowed. That rule is still burned into my brain and it makes me cringe every time I violate it. *I did this. I felt that.* It's just not acceptable.

Mrs. Street did open my eyes to a new way of approaching writing. She is still my cranky English teacher. She is still mean. She will not give that A to anyone. She did, however, show me something that I will have to work on for years. I plan on coming back to her class in a few years with the most perfect essay reflecting my voice. That will show her. That will show her that I didn't deserve the B in her class.

I still don't have my voice. I have experimented with many types but none that have suited me perfectly. I think I will be looking for my voice for a while too. I am now free to explore the possibilities of all forms of writing. I'm not a natural writer that can effortlessly compose an A paper that reflects me. It is going to take me longer to find my fit—to make and create my voice.

Lanie Anton is a social science major.